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Update. Comet Oil CECRA site report /
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# UPDATE

## Comet Oil CECRA Site Report

By the Montana Department of Health and Environmental Sciences

## Investigation of site to begin this summer

In 1965 operations began at the Comet Oil Re-refining plant located in Lockwood, a community adjacent to Billings. The facility ceased refining operations in 1984 but stored waste oil until 1990 when all activities ceased. The Comet Oil site is soon to be investigated under the oversight of the state Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Response Act (CECRA) program administered by the Montana Department of Health and Environmental Sciences.

### Where is the site located?

The Comet Oil site covers approximately three acres in Lockwood. The plant is two miles east of downtown Billings on the frontage road which runs parallel to U.S. Interstate 90 in a primarily industrial and agricultural area.

### What was the site used for?

Comet Oil, owned by Mountain States Petroleum Corporation, of Billings, refined used motor oil beginning in 1965. The oil was treated with acid and filtered to remove metal contaminants. The metals in the oil were the result of engine wear and leaded fuel. The oil was then heated to remove any volatile contaminants and moisture.

### How did site contamination occur?

Contamination at the site may have resulted from several practices:

1. Acid-metals sludge and clay used for filtering were disposed of in unlined pits on the property. The pits were subsequently covered with dirt and still exist on site.

2. Spillage of oils and other wastes resulting from product handling occurred over the years. In March 1985, the site was vandalized and 80,000 to 100,000 gallons of used oil was spilled, much but not all of which was subsequently recovered and disposed. The spilled material flowed onto Mountain States Petroleum property as well as adjacent property to the north, and to a ditch east of the site.

3. Various hazardous materials may have been mixed with or contained in the waste oil which was handled at the plant.

### What contamination is at the site?

Contamination at the site includes acid sludge containing lead and other materials, waste oil and chlorinated solvents. These contaminants have reached soils and groundwater at the site. A potential exists for air contamination primarily due to blowing dust from contaminated soils. A number of wells are located near the site including wells used for domestic, agricultural and industrial purposes.

Preliminary site studies showed contamination of groundwater at a depth of 18 feet and of soils as deep as 20 feet. Laboratory analysis of the groundwater samples showed 10 carbon-based compounds typically found in waste oils. The drainage ditch which runs east of the property discharges to the Yellowstone River three quarters of a mile north of the site and has the potential to carry contaminants to the river. The exact nature and extent of contamination is yet to be determined.

### What is the next step?

The Montana Department of Health and Environmental Sciences (MDHES) has added the Comet Oil site to its list of state CECRA sites. By law the state must offer to the responsible party the opportunity to conduct the investigation of the site. The party responsible for the site, Mountain States Petroleum, will investigate contamination problems at the site under state oversight. MDHES has negotiated with Mountain States Petroleum Corporation an administrative order on consent, which is a legal document directing investigation of the site. Under the order, the company must also evaluate alternatives for site remedy.

MDHES released the administrative order on consent to the public August 9 beginning a 30-day public comment period on the order. (For more information about the comment period, please refer to "How can the public be involved in this process?")

Investigation of the site will include installing and sampling more monitoring wells to get more information about groundwater contamination and further soils and ditch sediment sampling. Mountain States Petroleum will also gather information about wells within one-half mile of the site. The company will collect other pertinent information such as historical use of the site, current land use and surface water flows.

MDHES will conduct the risk assessment for the site. This step in the process includes evaluating site contaminants and what risk they pose to public health and the environment. The entire investigation is expected to last two years.

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# How can the public be involved?

Public involvement is vital to the success of the site investigation and remedy process. The public is encouraged to learn more about site issues and to voice questions, concerns, and suggestions. MDHES is currently preparing for the remedial investigation, or information-gathering, portion of the process. It is important that the public become involved early in these investigations so all perspectives about the site can be considered and concerns addressed.

There are a number of ways the public can be involved in the site:

1. Form a citizens group:

At several sites, residents have formed citizens groups that meet regularly and work closely with MDHES. Currently, no citizens group exists for the Comet Oil site, but MDHES encourages the public to form a group. Citizen groups are organized and run by the citizens. MDHES staff is available to help make presentations and discuss site issues with these groups.

2. Obtain progress reports:

MDHES will publish periodic progress reports such as this one. These progress reports are sent to interested parties who have requested they be placed on the MDHES mailing list. If you want to be on the mailing list or are not sure if you are on it, please fill out and send in the mailing list form.

3. Contact site project officer and public information officer:

MDHES Comet Oil site Project Officer Kevin Kirley and Public Information Officer Jane Stiles are available to discuss the project with the public, either individually or at group meetings. You can reach Kevin or Jane by calling the MDHES CECRA/Superfund toll-free number in Helena: 1-800-648-8465, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., weekdays, except holidays. The MDHES address is 836 Front St., Helena, MT 59620.

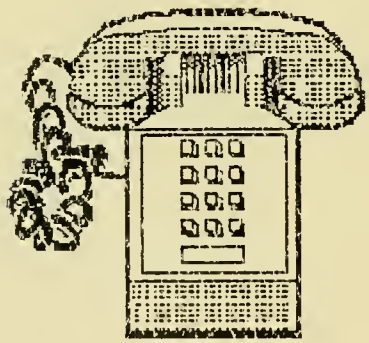
4. Review site documents at information repositories:

Documents about the Comet Oil CECRA site can be found at the following locations:

- State Library in Helena
- Billings Parmley Public Library (two copies will be kept here. One copy will be available for check-out and the other will be kept in the reference section.)

5. Submit comments during public comment periods:

MDHES will hold a public comment period from August 9 to September 9 about the administrative order on consent and work plan. If you have comments about either or both, please send them to: Kevin Kirley, Montana Department of Health and Environmental Sciences, 836 Front Street, Helena, MT 59620.



If you have questions, comments or concerns about the Comet Oil CECRA site, please call our toll-free CECRA-Superfund hotline in Helena.
1-800-648-8465
8 a.m. - 5 p.m. weekdays, except holidays

## Are you on our mailing list?

If you wish your name to be added to or deleted from the mailing list for the Comet Oil CECRA site, or if you wish to update your address, please fill out, detach, and mail the following form to Janie Stiles, Montana Department of Health and Environmental Sciences, 836 Front St., Helena, MT 59620.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State _____ Zip _____

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